Ascension

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Ascension

by TigerPrawn

Summary

A man with no equal could never have a soulmate, Hannibal is certain of that.

Notes

This is my fic from @lovecrimebooks #RavageAnthology
Sort of prequel to my Radiance Anthology fic - Evolution

Beta'd by the amazing Victorine

ascension

"Mischa, you could never have a soul mate," he had teased, smiling fondly even as she frowned at his words. It was only really a fairytale of course, so few people had soul mates these days - an evolutionary dead end. But Mischa had a love for fairy tales, so it was an easy thing to tease. Not that he could do so for long - she was too precious and her frown hurt him too much for him to continue.

So he kissed her forehead and chuckled as she scowled. "Dear one, sweet sister - a soul mate is an equal and there could never be one equal to you."

She had beamed at the compliment and laughed, taking his hand.

As he returned the warm smile she paled. Hannibal looked down to realise her flesh had turned to dust and the hand in his was nothing but bones. Bones that fell from his hand and into a bowl of gruesome soup.

"Mischa!" Hannibal woke covered in sweat and with eyes on him.

The dark and troubled eyes of other boys in the orphanage, startled by his voice and annoyed at being woken. He didn't speak during the day; he'd had so many words when he was younger but now none would come to him except in his dreams, as he screamed in the face of his terror.

Since those cold days of horror - since Mischa - he had felt lost and full of a fear he didn't dare show.

Perhaps the bullies and cretins that surrounded him thought the fear was for them, but he knew much crueller enemies.

Crueller than them, more than those who had killed and tormented before them, his fear was of a loss that had already happened - and the cruel inability to reverse time as he might wish. His nights were haunted by dreams that showed him as the weak and small child he was, a hateful reminder. His life was haunted by a beast, a spectre that made his heart race and his blood run cold. A shadow that would forever chase him toward hell, he was sure. Unless he took control himself, fought back where he had been unable to as the pitiful child he had been with Mischa needed him. One he swore to be no more.

The next evening the boys came for him, holding him down to beat him as they laughed at his fears and the names he cried in his sleep. A fear none of them would ever know the depths of. At least, not until he instilled it in them. It would do no good to struggle against multiple attackers, no his retribution would be precise, a strike against each individual when they least expected it.

When the lights went out, he retaliated - raw and unrefined.

*

"Why am I not afraid to enter here? One should only be afraid of those things which have the power of doing others harm. For the rest? Fear not, because they are not fearful," Hannibal's aunt asserted as she opened the door to the hospital.

He had expressed an interest in learning medicine and she had seized upon it with fervor. She had a desire to encourage him to be all and everything he might be, now that adulthood was upon him.

When he was a child he had excelled at his studies and his tutors had told him often that there was little he couldn't accomplish - he was a rare and talented mixture of creative and academic skill. It had been taken for granted that he could be a doctor, a philosopher, an artist, a mathematician or musician. It didn't matter because his family position, title and wealth meant that he had no need to earn his own means and so any career would be for his interest alone.

For a long time he had no interests. He had spoken no words, not even to Lady Murasaki when he had come to be in the household of his aunt after running from the orphanage. And then, after long weeks, he had begun to talk - she drew words from him like a fisherman would lure their quarry. And now she encouraged him in every way that might make a life for him, that might give him the life he had been born to and denied.

It had taken little for her to arrange this trip to the hospice ward. She was not unknown or friendless, a Japanese woman of means in the heart of Paris. She had people who were her friends, even if she was not theirs. And so she took him to encourage him. To see the sick and dying and show him, he assumed, the worthiness of the path he considered.

"Here all suspicion must be abandoned, all cowardice must be gone," Murasaki said at the door. "Medicine is impartial - the Hippocratic Oath knows no prejudice." She laid her hand on Hannibal's arm, her confidence clear and encouraging, and it comforted him. She led him in amongst the secret things. A place of horrors. Amongst the dying.

The smell was acrid - a mixture of stinging disinfectant and decaying blood. The sounds were deafening in their terror rather than volume - sounds of anger and agony.

"Who are these people here Hannibal?" she asked him, though he was sure he wasn't meant to answer. She continued without a glance to him as she led him between the hospital beds. "This miserable place holds the common man. He lives without condemnation or praise. His entire existence is a limbo, and he will die with neither fame nor infamy. The world has no record of his existence." She turned to Hannibal then, her eyes sparkling in that same way they had the day he had brought her the head of the butcher - her tormentor. "This is not your fate Hannibal." Her words were a command and he nodded.

Many times in his youth he had felt that death might come for him. But fate had spared him as it hadn't his parents, his sister, the vile butcher. Thoughts of the man's head - his glazed and fixed eyes - made Hannibal feel righteous. He was no man, that butcher. He was a pig. Like the flesh he sliced and sold, he was no better than swine and deserved neither fame nor infamy. He deserved to die unknown by the world.

Murasaki waved her hand over the room, bidding him to look his fill. "These folk all perish in the wrath of God." The stench of death seemed ever stronger and Hannibal took them all in. Wretches indeed - sick and ailing from illnesses that might not have blighted them but for their poor nutrition. Some had infections and simple wounds that would not heal. And at the end of the room a nurse tended one such wretch, administering medicine that would ease his pain but not cure him.

"But... doctors, they assist these people. People live or die by the skill and expertise of the doctors who treat them," Hannibal said, frowning and looking at her for some great truth and guidance.

She smiled, a gentle and devious curve to her lips that spoke of her delight at Hannibal's words - he had said just the right thing, he knew. She nodded and answered, "Why Hannibal, are doctors not gods?"

She turned then and her shoes clacked on the cold floor as she made her way between more beds and to the exit. Hannibal smiled as she walked away, her lesson was over for today.

*

Florence was a city meant for nothing but beauty. A city made for someone who could create beauty from ugliness. Transform the rude into the sublime.

As Hannibal sliced through the flesh, he marvelled at how honed his skills had become since his studies began. He would make an excellent surgeon, he was told often. Not just for his skill, but his detachment. His ability to separate himself from the emotion of treating patients.

It was of course an easy enough task when those he treated were not, and could never aspire to be, his equal. It was easy to separate himself from them as any man might separate himself from cattle or swine. He had the same compassion as any man might have for that cow, but whilst his pride in his skills would have him strive to be the very best, he needed only to see the flesh that he treated and nothing beyond. The flesh that he prepared warranted no special distinction, only notable in that his skill was used well for flesh other than his patients.

When this flesh now before him was prepared to his desire, Hannibal reached for the flowers - some of the finest available in Florence. Flowers that befit the beauty of the city, and the ascension of these lately expired residents.

He wound the flowers so beautifully together, framing the scene. Murasaki had been more than a guide in the path of his life, she had also taught him about beauty in so many forms. And now he could pair them - the beauty he could create from death with the beauty she had instilled in him - turning his hand to ikebana with presumably no thought to how he might use it.

Hannibal tried to ignore the extra care he gave this tableau. He wanted to pretend that he gave it no more than the artistic attention to detail that he normally did. These people were no more or less than anyone else. They were nothing of note in life and would not be in death, but for one thing -

They were soul mates.

It shouldn't matter. And it didn't really, it made them no different as people, in life or death.

Another flower placed just so, a signature in some ways. Beautiful creations he made that drew the eye and the heart - centre of all feeling one way or the other. Enough to link tableaux together as the work of his hand, the work of a hand instructed so finely. An anonymous fame, and infamy too. It drew a grin as he worked.

Of course, he could have fame or infamy himself, be known for his private actions and made both famous and infamous by them. But he strove meticulously to have neither - to seem like the very best of the cattle around him whilst being their superior on a level they would never comprehend. Murasaki had made him understand that, and so much more. He was more than the common man, but he knew that he must walk amongst them if he wished to remain free.

He might attract friendships and interest through his talents - his art, his music. But he ensured that it was never enough to be known beyond his social circles. He was becoming very practiced at wearing a person suit, taking some lessons on it from Murasaki. She had one of her own in some ways. Presented what she needed to present. A manipulation of the truth people perceived - the demure Japanese Lady, so people believed. He found it, as likely she did, and enjoyable fiction, allowing for an entertaining life.

All of Murasaki's lessons were bone deep within him. They were a guide in his own ascension through the layers of his life that had all started with her first lesson - he was not, and never could be, one of the cattle of humanity. He would only give the appearance of that, but in truth his deeds would outlive him. These flowers he now placed would fade and perish and yet outlive him. He was above all, as Murasaki had intimated - he held the power of a god if he so wished it. A power over life and death.

He had no equal.

These two were nothing special for their connection. Now conjoined in mortality and made beautiful. Beautiful in a way that only his skilled hand could design in death, in a way no soul bond could achieve in life.

But as Hannibal put the final touches to the tableau before him, he wondered what it might be like to have someone see beyond the facade he presented. To have an equal as he had assured Mischa she never could.

He let out a low chuckle at the ridiculous thought.

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"You are such a talent Hannibal, a pure talent. Doctor, gourmand, musician. Is there anything you cannot do?" Mrs Komeda didn't draw breath long enough to give him a chance to reply. "Each dinner party is eclipsed by the next, how do you do it?"

Hannibal gently demurred, such fun to watch her preen. She didn't want a response, she merely wished to gush her own delight and make herself part of his accomplishments.

Hannibal was used to this from her and others. It was part of his life. Part of this fabrication - the person suit that hid him from them. It brought him endless amusement.

He was a god amongst them. Some perhaps he was more fond of, as one might be of a pet. But they were nothing more than the common folk of that hospice of years ago. Murasaki's guidance had never left him.

“This whole evening is invigorating Hannibal, what is your secret?” This time she paused for an answer and he smiled at her politely.

“No secret. The feast is life, you put the life in your belly and you live,” he replied, his smile resultant of his own little joke rather than any joviality toward his guests. They returned it nonetheless, which was all the more amusing.

As his guests further waxed poetic about the meal he had bestowed upon them, he considered how none were his equal. He had yet to meet anyone who was, not that the expectation had ever really been there. Not since Florence. Not since Paris. Not since his childhood. Not since Mischa.

There might be some he considered pets, yes. But there were none that he would consider, as himself, above the concept of good and evil. There would never be any he might feel compassion for, as an equal.

*

Hannibal sat in the office with Jack Crawford.

And Will Graham.

The man whose profile Jack had given him. He had been intrigued by the profile alone and the little he knew from conversations in professional circles about the man and the pure empathy he felt. The notes on him had been factual only, and Hannibal had been quite unprepared for the rather belligerent man before him.

What was more, he had been entirely unprepared for the dull ache that started in his chest the moment they were introduced. Merely irksome at first, but growing with every passing moment.

His mind tried to grasp hold of something, a realisation that it couldn’t immediately resolve. The brusque manner of the man was something Hannibal often found distasteful and yet, for reasons he couldn’t understand, there was no dark intent on his part towards Will Graham. No thoughts as to the right aperitif to serve before an appetizer of the man’s tongue.

Instead there was a prickle over his skin - a current - a sensation he had never felt before. The ache, strangely, was becoming familiar - as though it were a part of him and always had been. As they discussed the case before them and Will grew ever more agitated, that ache radiated. A warm pain that was uniquely comforting as it spread within him. A sensation he had read about and had known assuredly, until minutes previously, that he would never feel.

Could never feel.

Could never find, because it was utterly unthinkable that such a person could exist. In a world of amusing pet cattle, this was unexpected.

He wondered if Will could feel it too.

He wondered if Will Graham could sense the one thing that Hannibal had believed never possible.

He had found an equal. His soul mate.

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